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A PRACTICAL CATECHISM

ON

BAPTISM.

BY

JOHN LAING, M.A., D.D.

Pastor of Knox Church, Dundas.

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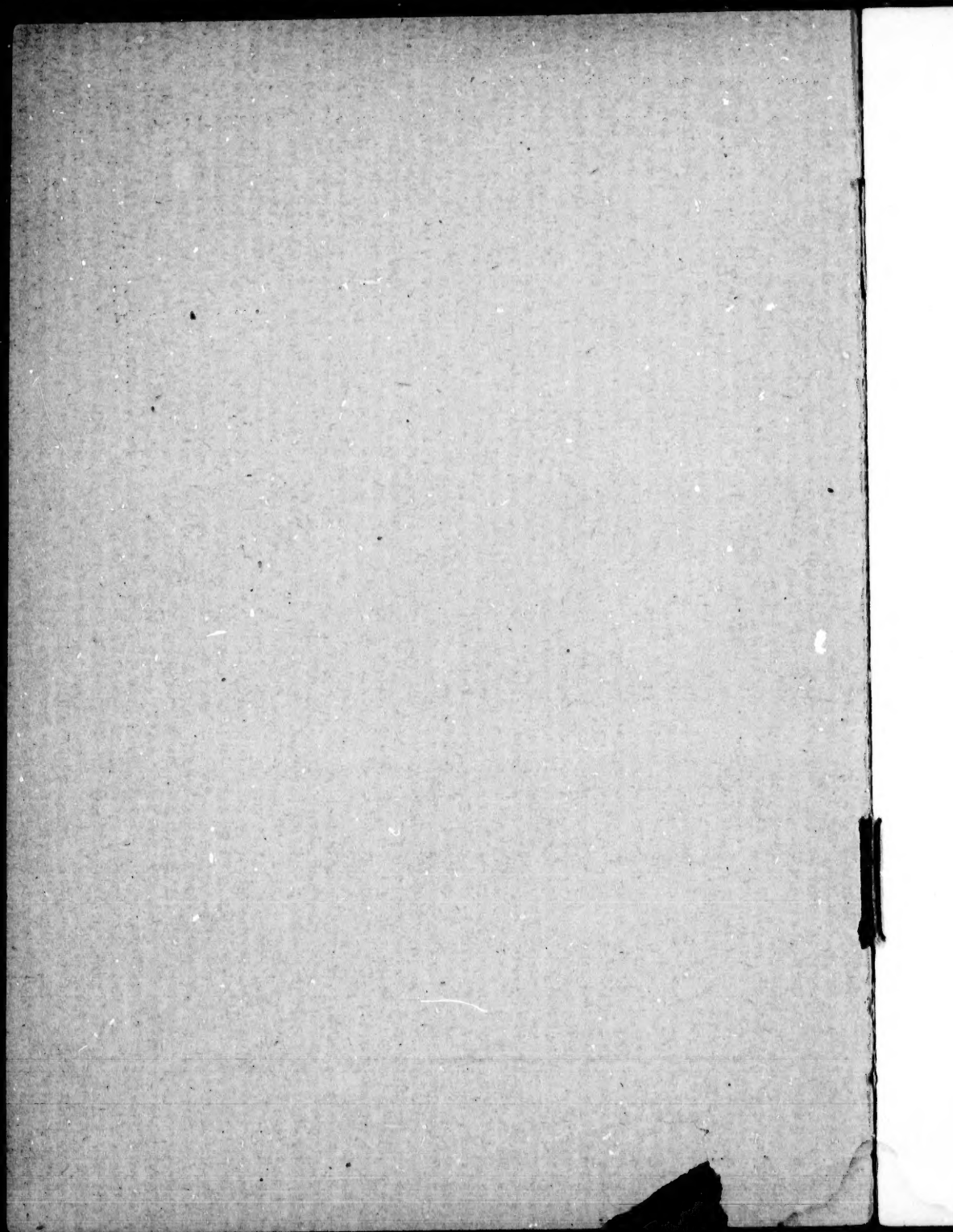
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PREFACE.

THIS tract in catechetical form is intended as a practical guide to the doctrine and practice of Christian baptism, which may be put into the hands of catechumens and of parents when, for the first time, they apply for the baptism of their children.

The author has long felt the need of some such treatise ; not to take the place of those excellent large works which vindicate Pædobaptism, but to instruct our people as to the scriptural authority, which alone is the basis of our Presbyterian doctrine and practice.

Baptism in the congregation on the Lord's day, as part of Divine worship, is in many places fast disappearing. This is much to be lamented ; as in this way that most appropriate opportunity, formerly enjoyed by our people for receiving needed instruction, is thereby lost. Also, this solemn ordinance instituted by Christ is becoming, in the eyes of many, a mere "church institution," in which children receive their names, but which has not the authority and sanction of God ; or a worthless remnant of Romish superstition, which intelligent disciples of the Lord should eschew.

The clear, logical definitions of our Westminster standards on the subject of baptism are given, not as possessing authority of themselves, but because they rest on and are fair deductions from the Word of God. Arguments from history and tradition are not given, because, however strong they may be, they have no force apart from Scripture. Nevertheless, the all but universal practice of the churches in all places, and from the first, should have weight, especially when we consider what the few exceptions are, viz. : one or two sects in the post-apostolic ages, the Anabaptists of the Reformation era, the several sects of modern Baptists, and Brethrenism in its various phases.

This book goes forth with the prayer that it may be useful to many who desire to know the mind of God regarding baptism, and the privileges which belong to their children, born as they are within the covenant of grace, and in God's account from their birth members of the visible church of Christ.

JOHN LAING.

DUNDAS, ONT., May, 1897.

A CATECHISM ON BAPTISM.

All that we know concerning Christian Baptism is to be learned from the New Testament Scriptures. That Bible teaching is found shortly stated in the Westminster standards; and some of these statements are given below for the information of any who desire to know what the Presbyterian Church holds as the Bible doctrine of Christian Baptism.

I.

The Nature and Institution of Christian Baptism.

Baptism is a sacrament: that is a holy ordinance instituted by Christ; wherein the washing with water, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost, doth signify and seal our engrafting into Christ and partaking of the benefits of the covenant of grace and our engagement to be the Lord's. (Shorter Catechism, questions 92 and 94.)

1. *What is an Ordinance?*

Ans. Something appointed by God to be done or observed. (Gen. xvii. 10-14; Ex. xiii. 7, 10; Matt. xxviii. 19-20; 1 Cor. xi. 23-26.)

2. *When and by whom was Christian Baptism appointed or instituted?*

Ans. Just before our Lord Jesus Christ ascended to the right hand of God, he commanded his apostles, saying (R.V.), "All authority has been given unto me in heaven and on earth. Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." (Matt. xxviii. 18-20.)

3. *Is Christening a proper name for the Ordinance?*

Ans. No. To "Christen," means to make one a Christian; and many think that as at baptism, the name used formerly to be given to the child for the first time, so to christen merely means to give the name, by which as a Christian he shall afterwards be known. Thus the spiritual import of baptism is utterly ignored. Then the term "Christen" is not found in Scripture. It comes from the Church of Rome, which teaches that baptism effects a change in the nature of the person baptized; and that no grown person or infant who dies unbaptized can enter heaven. The Church of England, also teaches that baptism makes a change in the person baptized. In the Catechism it is said, "My godfathers and godmothers gave me my name in my baptism, wherein I was made a member of Christ, the child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Seeing, therefore, that the word "Christen" has no scriptural sanction, ignores the spiritual element in baptism, tends to inculcate the doctrine of salvation by the rite of baptism, and otherwise to mislead, it should not be used.

4. *If Baptism does not save, or regenerate, or give the name, of what use is it?*

Ans. It is an outward and sensible sign—that is, a sign perceived by the senses—and a seal of the benefits which are bestowed by Christ on all his true disciples.

5. *What benefits of the covenant of grace are particularly signified and set forth in Baptism?*

Ans. Union to Christ; the forgiveness of sins; and the removal of our sinful nature. More generally, as the object of washing is to cleanse, so baptism signifies cleansing from the guilt of sin by the atoning blood of Christ, and from the polluting power thereof by the Holy Spirit's work within the believer. Both of these benefits are bestowed on all who are spiritually united to Christ by faith, and consecrated to Him. The water outwardly applied to the flesh thus becomes the symbol of God's saving grace applied inwardly to the soul. (Gal. iii. 27; Col. ii. 11, 12; 1 Peter iii. 21; Rom. vi. 1-11.)

6. *When are a man's sins forgiven, and his heart renewed?*

Ans. When he accepts Christ as his Saviour and truly repents, turning from sin to God.

7. *Who then should be allowed the privilege of Christian Baptism?*

Ans. All who profess faith in Christ and obedience to Him on behalf of themselves and their offspring with them.

8. *May not a man profess to accept Christ as his Lord, and to obey Him, who is not truly a child of God?*

Ans. Yes. Our Lord tells us so (Matt. vii. 21-23), and thus many in all churches are baptized who are not true Christians. Such was Simon Magus. (Acts viii. 13, 21; see also Rom. ii. 28; Phil. iii. 18.) No minister of Christ can know the heart; God alone can judge whether a man is sincere. The Scripture does not teach "Believer Baptism," but baptism on profession, or "Professor Baptism." (Acts viii. 37, and chap. xix. 5.)

9. *After a man has been baptized is he a member of the Church of Christ?*

Ans. Yes; and his life should be consistent with his profession and privilege. (Acts ii. 41-47; Rom. xii. 1; Eph. iv. 1.) It is, however, of the visible church only that he becomes a member after baptism; and in it there are many unconverted persons who are unworthy members thereof. Baptism does not put a man into the invisible church of God. (Phil. iii. 18; Rev. chaps. ii. and iii.)

10. *Which was the first visible church?*

Ans. The church in Jerusalem, which was formed by the apostles on the day of Pentecost, and consisted of the three thousand persons who were on that day baptized. (Acts ii. 41, 42, 47; viii. 1.)

11. *Was not the church of Rome the first church, as Roman Catholics assert?*

Ans. No; far from it. Besides the first in Jerusalem there were other churches founded as in Samaria, Cæsarea,

Antioch and other cities in Asia by the apostles years before there was one in Rome. (Acts viii. 14-17 ; x. 47, 48 ; xi. 22-26 ; xiii. 1.)

12. *Was there not a church before the day of Pentecost ?*

Ans. Yes. (Matt. xviii. 17 ; Acts vii. 38.) God always had his church, called out of and separate from the world. Under the Mosaic dispensation the visible church was the people of Israel, organized according to the law of God. Of this Jewish church Jesus Christ and his apostles were members.

13. *Were Jesus and the apostles received into that church by baptism ?*

Ans. No. They were born in the church ; and when eight days old they received the rite of circumcision as a token or sensible sign of the covenant which God had made with Abraham and his descendants ; and a " seal of the righteousness of faith " (Rom. iv. 11), of consecration to God (Gen. xvii. 9-14), and of spiritual cleansing and putting away of the filth of the flesh. (Col. iii. 10 ; 1 Peter iii. 21.)

14. *Were not Jesus and His Disciples baptized before the day of Pentecost.*

Ans. Yes. Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, some of the apostles also (Matt. iii. 13-17 ; John i. 35, 40) ; but we are not told that they all were. The baptism of John, however, was not Christian baptism, and had nothing to do with the Christian Church.

15. *Why not ?*

Ans. Because, (1) The Baptism of Jesus by John was allowed so as " to fulfil all righteousness " (Matt. iii. 15), that is to fulfil the ceremonial righteousness required by the law of Moses. It could not in the case of the Holy Son of God signify the remission of sins, or his admission into the Church which was not to be established till three years after. (2) John, when baptizing, told the people to expect another and higher baptism by Him who should come after him, " with spirit and fire," when the kingdom should have come (Matt. iii. 11).

(3) Neither our Lord nor His apostles could be baptized into the name of the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, as is required in Christian baptism; for when John was baptizing, Christ had not died for sins nor risen again, nor had the Holy Ghost been given. (4) Those who had been "baptized into John's baptism" had afterwards to be baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus" (Acts xix. 3-5). (5) There was no Christian Church in the time of John, nor until the day of Pentecost, of which Jesus or the apostles could be members. Clearly, therefore, the baptism of Jesus was not Christian baptism, had not the same meaning or significance, did not admit into the visible Church of Christ, and ought not to be held forth as an "example" which we are commanded to follow.

16. *Were there any ordinances in the Jewish church which set forth and signified cleansing from sin; that is, forgiveness and regeneration?*

Ans. Yes. Circumcision, or the putting off of the body of the flesh (Col. ii. 11; Acts vii. 51); sacrifices for sin (Lev. viii. 14; xvi. 3, 15, 21, 22); divers washings and sprinklings (Ps. li. 7-11)—all which were commanded by the law as symbolic acts of forgiveness and spiritual purification.

17. *Is baptism an act of obedience to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ?*

Ans. (1) Yes; so far as the minister of Christ in administering the outward rite obeys His command, given in Matt. xxviii. 19, to "make disciples baptizing them," etc. (2) No; so far as the person receiving baptism is concerned, for he is wholly passive in the matter, does nothing but receives for himself or child the outward sign or seal of what God has done for him in Christ Jesus, and has promised to do for all who are willing to receive His grace. Without question many receive the outward rite who do not perform the act of obedience implied in faith and repentance; nevertheless their baptism is valid, being the act of Christ's servant in His name and by His authority.

18. *If, then, baptism does not save, nor in itself convey grace, nor put a man into the kingdom of God, or into the*

visible church ; and if it is not an act of obedience ; why should it be observed ?

Ans. Because Christ has commanded his servants to whom he has entrusted the gospel message, to put on those who profess to be his disciples this sign and seal of the covenant which proclaims (1) Discipleship, (2) Union to Christ, (3) Pardon and cleansing—which things are true in the experience of every real Christian. Moreover, when baptism is received in faith it becomes effectual as a means of grace by the working of Christ's spirit in the recipient. Without faith and the baptism of the Holy Spirit baptism with water effects nothing.

II.

Baptism of Infants.

“Baptism is not to be administered to any that are out of the visible church, till they profess their faith in Christ and obedience to him ; but infants descended from parents, either both or one of whom, professing faith in Christ and obedience to him, are in that respect within the covenant and to be baptized.” (Larger Catechism, question 166.)

19. *Should Infants be Baptized ?*

Ans. The Scriptures teach that the children of Christian parents should be baptized. As appears from what follows : (1) As the parent is Christ's, so is the offspring (Ezek. xviii. 4 ; xvi. 21) ; the child is “not unclean, but holy,” having right of access to God (1 Cor. vii. 14) ; and being claimed by God as his, ought to be formally dedicated to Him.

(2) Infants were received by Christ, and he declared that to “them belongs the Kingdom of Heaven.” (Matt. xix. 14.)

(3) As children who belong to God, they are to be “brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” (Eph. vi. 4 ; Duet. vi. 7) ; and they are interested in the promise of the covenant. (Acts ii. 39.)

(4) Infants are saved by God's grace through the mediation of Christ, and should receive the sign of that salvation.

(5) Households were baptized by the apostles. For beyond question among the Jews, children, if there were any in the family, were included in the household, and were circumcised along with their fathers (Gen. xvii. 24-27; xxi. 4; Josh. v. 2, 8); also, as the Christian church is more extended than was the Jewish, including women expressly and Gentiles, so surely it is not made narrower by excluding children. (Acts xvi. 15; xxxiii. chap.; x. 48; 1 Cor. i. 16; Luke xix. 9.)

20. *Is there any passage of Scripture in which it is expressly stated that Infants were Baptized?*

Ans. No; not as far as Christian baptism is concerned. But in 1 Corinthians x. 2, it is said of the Israelites that when they passed through the Red Sea they were "All baptized into Moses in the cloud and in the sea." Surely this baptism included the infants. Further, there is no mention made in the Acts of a child of Christian parents, brought up in the nurture of the Lord, being baptized when grown up on his own profession; all the cases recorded were of Jews, or proselytes, or heathen with their households. And yet, before the book of Acts was written, thousands of Christian children must have grown to full membership in the churches of Christ.

21. *But infants cannot understand what is done to them, nor profess faith and repentance, of what use then can baptism be in their case?*

Ans. The same objection lies against God's ordinance of circumcision which was observed when the child was eight days old. Nevertheless every Israelitish child had by birth a right to all the privileges of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, and was under obligation to perform every duty. "The promise was to them" as to their fathers. (Acts ii. 39.) In like manner children under the new covenant, being born within the church of God, have a right to all its privileges; also Christian parents come under solemn obligation to bring up their children as children of God, and in the baptism of their

offspring have a sign and seal of God's covenant promise to be the God of their children and to save them if they use the appointed means of grace.

22. What benefit can a child which is not converted get from being baptized?

Ans. (1) Adults may not be converted when they believe, nevertheless it is the duty of Christ's minister to baptize them when they profess faith in Christ and obedience; and such baptism is valid. In like manner, although a child is not conscious of being converted, its baptism is proper, valid baptism. (2) Further, an infant may be regenerated by God's grace, although as yet quite unconscious of God's work, and may grow up loving and obeying the Lord from its earliest years, and partaking of all the spiritual benefits of which its baptism was the sign and seal. It is therefore proper to put on infants the seal of the covenant under which they are saved.

III.

The Mode of Baptism.

"Dipping of the person into the water is not necessary; "but baptism is rightly administered by pouring or sprinkling water upon the person." (Confession of Faith, chap. xxviii.; sec. 3.)

23. How is baptism to be administered?

Ans. By applying water to the person in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. (Acts x. 47.)

24. Is not baptism by immersion properly baptism?

Ans. Yes. Although by this mode water is not applied to the person, but the person is applied to the water. Notwithstanding this difference spiritual cleansing is thereby signified, and the spiritual blessings of union with Christ in his death to sin, in his rising again to newness of life, in his separation for a world spiritually dead, together with forgiveness of sin and renewal

of nature are symbolized and sealed. (Rom. vi. 1-11 ; Col. ii. 11-15 ; 1 Peter iii. 21.) Hence it is valid baptism.

25. *What other mode of baptism is there ?*

Ans. According to Scripture baptism is said to be effected by pouring and sprinkling (Acts i. 5 ; ii. 17 ; Matt. iii. 11 ; Mark vii. 3, 4 ; 2 Kings iii. 11 ; Luke xi. 38 ; John ii. 6). In this way the outward rite of ceremonial cleansing was performed.

26. *But in all instances of baptism recorded in the New Testament was not the body put under water ?*

Ans. No, indeed ; on the contrary very far from this. 1. There is not a passage in the New Testament where any one is said to have been put wholly *under* water. The passages which are supposed to state this are : (1) Acts viii. 38, in which it is said, "They both went down *into* the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him." (R.V.) But a careful reader will see that what is stated is that the two men went down from the chariot which was standing beside the water and in which they had been sitting (v. 31.) *to* the water so as to be able to reach and use it ; then Philip administered the ordinance, after which they both came up again from the water, and the eunuch at least went up into his chariot. But nothing is said of wading into deep water (if there was such) or of one being put under water by the other. All this is mere inference.* (2) Romans vi. 4, where it is said, "Buried with him by baptism," and which is taken to mean, "put under water as Christ was put under ground." That this cannot be the proper meaning appears clear (a) when the proper, full translation of the passage is

* In John, 20th chapter, the Greek preposition *εἰς* is translated, verse 1, *viz.*, *unto*, verse 3, *towards* (R.V.) verse 4, *to* (*i.e.* up to), verse 6, *into* and *in*. This shows that the meaning of this preposition must, in any particular passage, be determined by the context. But *εἰς* never means *down under*, nor does *ἐκ* ever mean up from under ; yet this must be the meaning of these two words if the passage states that in baptism the eunuch was put down under water and lifted again up from under it.

given, *viz.*, v. 3, "As many as were baptized into Christ were baptized into his death," not into water, but spiritually into dying with Him; v. 4, "We were, therefore, buried with him through" (*δια*, by means of) "*the baptism—into—death*" (not water baptism at all), that is the spiritual death spoken of in verse 3. The effect of which is to separate from this sinful world as burial separates from the natural world, so that we shall live no longer therein, as the following context shows. (b) From what is certain, *viz.*, that if "buried with him" means that the body was put under water *with* Christ, it is not a fact; for Christ was not physically under the water with the man when He was put under. In baptism, however, Christ is spiritually present to faith. This baptism, then, can be only spiritual, not bodily with water. (c) In verse 5 it is further said, "If we have become united with him by the likeness of his death, we shall be also by the likeness of his resurrection; knowing this, that our old man was *crucified* with him that the body of sin may be done away, that we should no longer be in bondage to sin" (R.V.), and so on to verse 11, all of which shows that the death and new life are spiritual, and are not connected with putting under water physically. (3) Col. ii. 11. Here the context clearly shows that a spiritual union is intended, not a dipping under water. "In Christ ye were circumcised with a circumcision not made with hands, in the putting off of the body of the flesh *in the circumcision of Christ*, having been buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye were raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead." (R.V.) "The circumcision of Christ" cannot mean the administration of that rite to the child Jesus when he was eight days old; it clearly means Christian circumcision; a spiritual experience when a man puts off the sins of the flesh; this the apostle calls "being buried with him in baptism," and, he adds, that the Christian is also "raised with him through the faith," etc. To take the phrase "buried in baptism" out of its context and to assert that it means put bodily under water by man and lifted out again by man, is surely to pervert the Word of God.

2. There are passages in which it is most probable that water was brought to the person and poured on him, and highly improbable that he was taken to a quantity of water and put under it.

(1) Acts ix. 19. Paul had been for three days confined to the house blind, and had eaten nothing, when Ananias said "arise and be baptized." (Acts xxii. 16.) And he arose and was baptized, and he took food and was strengthened. (Acts ix. 19.) Was it at all probable that in the circumstances he was immersed under water?

(2) Acts x. 47. The company was assembled in a room when "the Holy Ghost *fell on*" them; and Peter said, "Can any man forbid the water, that these should not be baptized . . . and he commanded them to be baptized." Surely it is far more probable that water was brought into the room and poured on them than that the whole company went out to a river or pond to be immersed.

(3) Acts xvi. 33. The jailor at Philippi, after his conversion, "took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes, and was baptized, he and all his, immediately." From this it appears that there was water in the prison with which the wounds of Paul and Silas had been washed. Is it not more than probable that the same water was used to baptize the jailor? Surely infinitely more probable than that at midnight the soldier took out his two prisoners, with bleeding backs, away from the prison to some river that he might be put under water by them, and afterwards brought them into his house.

3. There are passages in which baptism is spoken of in such a way as to exclude the idea of immersion under water. Such as Matt. xxviii. 19, where "baptizing *into* the name of the Father, etc., occurs; Acts xix. 3, *Into* what were you baptized? and they said *into* John's baptism (v. 5), and when they heard this they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. 1 Cor. x. 3, they were baptized *into* Moses." Thus *into* is used to denote the effect of baptism, but not the mode; we never find baptized *into* water, far less under water. Again, in Matt. iv. 11, we find baptize with (*ἐν*) water and with (*ἐν*)

the spirit ; also the dative of instrument used, but never (*εἰς*) into or (*ὑπο*) under with the word baptize.

(4) In 1 Cor. x. 2. "They were all baptized into (*εἰς*) Moses in (*ἐν*) the cloud and (*ἐν*) the sea." While it is beyond question that they were not dipped into the cloud, the moisture might have fallen on them. (Psalm lxxviii. 8.) Nor were they immersed in the sea, for they walked on dry land while their enemies sank as lead, and the waters covered them. Here, surely is baptism by cloud and sea, but certainly no immersion under and raising up from under water.

27. *Should all who have received Christian baptism be acknowledged as disciples?*

Ans. Yes. Whatever the work of administration may have been, and whatever denomination they may belong to, all Christian baptism is to be respected ; for the virtue of the sacrament does not depend on the outward rite, the person ministering, or the particular form used, provided always that the administrator has been commissioned by a church of Christ, and water has been applied with the words of institution.

28. *Should any one who has been baptized withdraw from church fellowship, or walk unworthily, is he to be regarded as no longer a disciple?*

Ans. No. Unless he openly renounces the Lord, and allegiance to Him, or is formally excommunicated. There are many most unworthy members of the visible church. (Phil. iii. 18 ; 2 Thess. iii. 14 ; 1 Cor. v. 5 ; 1 John v. 16.) Baptized persons should be affectionately dealt with, and if they fall should be warned of their danger, and subjected to godly discipline with a view to their restoration that their souls may be saved in the day of the Lord.

